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Advancement of women

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Traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming its resolution 53/117 of 9 December 1998 and its other relevant resolutions and decisions, as well as those of the Economic and Social Council, the Commission on Human Rights and the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights,

Recalling the reports of the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on traditional practices affecting the health of women and children and of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on violence against women,

Reaffirming the obligation of all States to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms as stated in the Charter of the United Nations, also reaffirming the obligations contained in later human rights instruments, in particular articles 5 and 12 of

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the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,[1] article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child[2] and article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,[3]

Reaffirming also article 2, paragraph a, of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women,[4] and article 5, paragraph 5, of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief,[5]

Recalling the provisions of the outcome of the Second World Conference on Human Rights,[6] the International Conference on Population and Development,[7] the Ninth United Nations Congress on the Prevention of Crime and the Treatment of Offenders,[8] and the Fourth World Conference on Women[9] pertaining to traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls,

Recalling also general recommendation 14 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women concerning female circumcision,[10] as well as paragraphs 11, 20 and 24 (l) of general recommendation 19 concerning violence against women[11] and paragraphs 15 (d) and 18 of general recommendation 24 concerning women and health,[12]

Welcoming the fact that the Organization of African Unity First Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in Africa, in the Grand Bay (Mauritius) Declaration and Plan of Action, adopted in April 1999, urged all African States to work assiduously towards the elimination of discrimination against women and the abolition of cultural practices which dehumanize or demean women and children,

Welcoming the Ouagadougou Declaration adopted in May 1999 at a regional workshop on the fight against female genital mutilation in the member countries of the West African Economic and Monetary Union,[13]

Reaffirming that such traditional or customary practices constitute a definite form of violence against women and girls and a serious form of violation of their human rights,

Expressing concern at the continuing large-scale existence of these practices,

Stressing that the elimination of such practices requires greater efforts and commitment from Governments, the international community and civil society, including non-governmental and community organizations, and that fundamental changes in societal attitudes are required,

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[1] Resolution 34/180, annex.

[2] Resolution 44/25, annex.

[3] Resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

[4] Resolution 48/104, annex.

[5] Resolution 36/55, annex.

[6] A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

[7] *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.

[8] See A/CONF.169/16/Rev.1.

[9] *Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annexes I and II.

[10] See *Official Records of the General Assembly, Forty-fifth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/45/38), chap. IV.

[11] Ibid., *Forty-seventh Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/47/38), chap. I.

[12] Ibid., *Fifty-fourth Session, Supplement No. 38* (A/54/38/Rev.1), chap. I.A.

[13] E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/14, annex.

1. *Welcomes*:

(a) The report of the Secretary-General, which provides encouraging examples of national and international developments;[14]

(b) The fact that the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commission on Human Rights addressed the issue of harmful traditional or customary practices at their sessions in 1999;

(c) The fact that the General Assembly, at its special session for the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development, has addressed the issue of harmful practices;

(d) The efforts undertaken by United Nations bodies, programmes and organizations, including the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Population Fund, the World Health Organization, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations Development Fund for Women, to address the issue of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, and encourages them to continue to coordinate their efforts;

(e) The work carried out by the Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation of the United Nations Population Fund including her visits to a number of countries and the fact that she has been invited to other countries;

(f) The work carried out by the Inter-African Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Girls and other non-governmental and community organizations, including women's organizations, in raising awareness of the harmful effects of such practices, in particular of female genital mutilation;

(g) The fact that the progress made toward the elimination of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls will be considered during the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century";

2. *Emphasizes* the need for technical and financial assistance for developing countries working to achieve the elimination of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls from United Nations funds and programmes, international and regional financial institutions, and bilateral and multilateral donors, as well as the need for assistance to non-governmental organizations and community-based groups active in this field from the international community;

3. *Calls upon* all States:

(a) To ratify or accede to, if they have not yet done so, the relevant human rights treaties, in particular the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Convention on the Rights of the Child,[1] and to respect and implement fully their obligations under any such treaties to which they are parties;

(b) To implement their international commitments in this field, *inter alia*, under the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action of the Fourth World Conference on Women,[9] the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development,[7] and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights;[15]

[14] A/54/341.

[15] A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

(c) To collect and disseminate basic data about the occurrence of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation;

(d) To adopt and implement national legislation and policies which prohibit traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, and to prosecute the perpetrators of such practices;

(e) To establish or strengthen support services to respond to the needs of victims through, *inter alia*, developing comprehensive and accessible sexual and reproductive health services and providing training to health-care providers at all levels on the harmful health consequences of such practices;

(f) To establish, if they have not done so, a concrete national mechanism for the implementation and monitoring of relevant legislation, law enforcement and national policies;

(g) To intensify efforts to raise awareness of and to mobilize international and national public opinion concerning the harmful effects of traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, in particular through education, the dissemination of information, training, the media, the arts and local community meetings, in order to achieve the total elimination of these practices;

(h) To promote the inclusion of discussion of the empowerment of women and their human rights in primary and secondary education curricula, and to address specifically traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls in such curricula and in the training of health personnel;

(i) To promote men's understanding of their roles and responsibilities with regard to promoting the elimination of harmful practices, such as female genital mutilation;

(j) To involve, among others, public opinion leaders, educators, religious leaders, chiefs, traditional leaders, medical practitioners, women's health and family planning organizations, the arts and the media in publicity campaigns with a view to promoting a collective and individual awareness of the human rights of women and girls and of how harmful traditional or customary practices violate those rights;

(k) To continue to take specific measures to increase the capacity of communities, including immigrant and refugee communities, in which female genital mutilation is practised, to engage in activities aimed at preventing and eliminating such practices;

(l) To explore, through consultations with communities and religious and cultural groups and their leaders, alternatives to harmful traditional or customary practices, in particular where those practices form part of a ritual ceremony or rite of passage;

(m) To cooperate closely with the Special Rapporteur of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights on traditional practices affecting the health of women and the girl child and to respond to her inquiries;

(n) To cooperate closely with relevant specialized agencies and United Nations funds and programmes, as well as with relevant non-governmental and community organizations, in a joint effort to eradicate traditional or customary practices affecting the health of women and girls;

(o) To include in their reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Committee on the Rights of the Child and other relevant treaty bodies specific information on measures taken to eliminate traditional or customary practices

affecting the health of women and girls, including female genital mutilation, and to prosecute the perpetrators of such practices;

4. *Invites*:

(a) Relevant specialized agencies, United Nations bodies and non-governmental organizations to exchange information on the subject of the present resolution, and encourages the exchange of such information between non-governmental organizations active in this field and the bodies monitoring the implementation of relevant human rights treaties;

(b) The Commission on Human Rights to address this subject at its fifty-sixth session, thus allowing a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of these practices on the human rights of women;

(c) Governments, organizations and individuals in a position to do so to contribute to the trust fund that supports the work of the Special Ambassador for the Elimination of Female Genital Mutilation of the United Nations Population Fund;[16]

5. *Requests* the Secretary-General:

(a) To make his report available to relevant meetings within the United Nations system;

(b) To report to the General Assembly at its fifty-sixth session on the implementation of the present resolution, with a special focus on recent national and international developments, including examples of national best practices and international cooperation.

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[16] Project on female genital mutilation elimination (INT/98/PEF):
UNFPA Contributions Account
The Chase Manhattan Bank, 270 Park Avenue, 43rd floor, New York, NY 10017
Account Number: 015-004570, ABA# 021000021